

Green Sense 08-04-2013

Re-using those Plastic Bags

Even the most diligent totebag user can end up with some plastic bags around the house. Don't just throw them out! There are plenty of ways to re-use them. Perhaps the most obvious re-use is to line your trash cans with these plastic bags. The "t-shirt" style bags from grocery stores are a size for small trash bins, just stretch the 'shoulder' over the edges of the bin.

Other plastic bags and packaging - for example, from large packages of bathroom tissue - can work to collect household trash as well. But if you end up with more bags than trash, here are some other ideas:

Wet/soiled clothing: Re-use plastic bags to keep damp bathing suits apart from your dry luggage while traveling. Send a couple of bags off to summer camp for the same purpose. Keep a plastic bag with an "emergency outfit" for small children, when needing a change of clothes away from home, use the bag to help transport the soiled outfit back home. If you have a baby in the house, skip the fancy diaper pails and just tie off the offending diapers in a reused shopping bag.

Shopping: You can always re-use your plastic bags on your next shopping trip. Tuck one into your purse or jacket pocket, to keep it handy.

Donate: Give your plastic bags to food shelves or second-hand stores. Check with local animal shelters to see if plastic bags are on their supply lists. Check with schools and pre-schools to see if they need bags for sending projects home. Use plastic bags to bundle your donations of used clothing, canned goods or pet supplies.

Craft projects: Plastic bags can be helpful for transporting craft projects home from school or birthday parties. They're especially helpful if the project still has wet paint, wet glue, and/or excess glitter. The bags themselves are also useful as craft material. You can cut them into strips and then knit them into sturdier tote bags (see http://www.ehow.com/how_2105694_knit-handbags-from-plastic-grocery.html for details). You can also weave, braid or twist the strips into bracelets and anklets.

Food storage: Save bread bags and other food packaging for storing leftovers. Using the last roll for today's sandwich? Don't put it into a brand new sandwich baggie. Just put the sandwich back into the roll's bag. If you buy larger packages of rolls, save the bags for freezing awkwardly shaped leftovers, such as turkey and ham bones that you're saving for soup. Use smaller bags to apply frosting or deviled egg filling, snip off a corner, and squeeze to pipe out. Got a nice pita bag with a zipper closure? Use it to send leftovers home with dinner guests.

Pet waste: Small bags from bread, rolls, newspapers and similar-sized items are great for cleaning up after your pet. As soon as you have an empty bag available, tie it to your pet's leash

to keep it handy for the next walk. Keep small bags near your cat's scoopable litter. Note if you have small herbivore pets (pets that eat only vegetables like guinea pigs, hamsters, etc), you don't need to put their used bedding in the trash - that can go into your compost pile.

Vehicle uses: Keep a small bag in the car on long road-trips for collecting snack wrappers and other trash. Use larger bags to line your trunk when transporting new plants home from the garden store. Keep a bag with your tire iron, in case it gets dirty when you have to use it.

Packing material: Use plastic bags as padding when sending a care package. Wrap seasonal decorations in bags to help protect them in storage. Use plastic bags to cushion fragile items when packing for a move.

To tie things up: In a mystery novel by Donna Leon, the inspector used plastic bags that were blowing around on the beach to tie up the criminal - that's creative re-use of plastic bags!

Recycling: Some stores have collection bins at their entrances, so if none of these 're-uses' use up your extras, please recycle!

A column by Reading Climate Committee members Stephanie Anderberg, Gina Snyder and Michele Benson